



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE arrests 179 in largest ever local operation targeting illegal alien fugitives and immigration violators

LAS VEGAS – In a major six-day operation, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers from three states fanned out across Clark County, arresting a total of 179 immigration violators, many of whom have outstanding orders of deportation.

As a result of the enforcement effort, which concluded yesterday, more than 130 of the aliens taken into custody have already been removed from the United States.

The arrests are part of ICE's national fugitive operations initiative, an enforcement strategy targeting illegal aliens who have been ordered deported by an immigration judge and failed to comply with those orders. It is estimated there are more than 500,000 such fugitive aliens currently in the United States.

"Taking immigration fugitives off of our streets is a top ICE priority," said John Torres, the national director of ICE detention and removal operations. "The people targeted in this operation had 'their day in court,' and were ordered deported by an immigration judge. Those immigration fugitives who remain at large should be on notice - the days when you could brazenly ignore an immigration judge's order are over. We are going to find you and send you home."

The majority of the aliens arrested during the Las Vegas area operation are Mexican nationals, but the group also included immigration violators from seven other nations - Iraq, Egypt, Peru, the Philippines, Samoa, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Since many of these individuals have already been through immigration proceedings, they are subject to immediate removal from the country.

Several of those taken into custody during this week's operation have criminal records, including past convictions for drug violations, assault, and weapons charges. Among those arrested was Nery De Leon, a 31-year-old Guatemalan national with suspected ties to the 18th Street Gang who was sentenced to four years in prison in California during the early 1990s for transporting drugs. ICE is seeking to federally prosecute De Leon for re-entry after deportation, a felony punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

ICE fugitive operations teams from Los Angeles and Phoenix traveled to Las Vegas to work in concert with local ICE officers on the enforcement effort. ICE also received substantial assistance in the operation from the Nevada Department of Public Safety Parole and Probation Division.

So far this fiscal year (October 2005 – April 2006), ICE fugitive operations teams nationwide have made more than 12,000 arrests, including nearly 6,000 criminal aliens. Of the aliens arrested, more than 6,800 have been removed from the United States. The four fugitive operations teams responsible for covering the Los Angeles area and Las Vegas have made more than 2,000 arrests during that same time frame.

The fugitive operations initiative is an integral part of the second phase of the Secure Border Initiative (SBI), a comprehensive multi-year plan launched by the Department of Homeland Security to secure America's borders and reduce illegal migration. Under SBI, Homeland Security seeks to gain operational control of both the northern and southern borders, while re-engineering the detention and removal system to ensure that illegal aliens are removed from the country quickly and efficiently. The SBI also involves strong interior enforcement efforts, including enhanced worksite enforcement, and intensified efforts to track down and remove illegal aliens inside this country.

The National Fugitive Operations Program became operational when ICE was established in March 2003. Today, there are 38 teams nationwide and ICE expects to expand that number to 52 by the end of the year. The long-term goal of the program is to eliminate the backlog of immigration fugitives in the United States and ensure that the number of aliens deported each year equals the number of final removal orders issued by the immigration courts.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.